

UPDATE- Striped Bass DEIS- Completion delayed

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is delaying completion of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared in response to an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) recommendation to remove the moratorium on the harvest of Atlantic striped bass in Federal waters (the Exclusive Economic Zone, or EEZ). The decision to delay completion is based on uncertainty in the results of the 2004 assessment of the status of striped bass populations along the Atlantic coast. That analysis indicated fishing mortality was well above the level determined to be appropriate for this population, as defined in the Commission's Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan. However, many of those who conducted the assessment do not believe that the results reflect the current status of the stock, which overall is at high levels of abundance. The 2004 stock assessment and Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (Amendment 6) can be found at the Commission's website- <http://www.asmfc.org/strippedBass.htm>

The Commission's Striped Bass Technical Committee will conduct another assessment of striped bass stock status, which will either confirm the 2004 results or identify problems with the that analysis, during 2005. Until the questions about uncertainty in the assessment and the status of the stock are addressed, NOAA Fisheries does not believe it is prudent to go forward with publication of the DEIS. Once the 2005 stock assessment is complete the DEIS will be updated to incorporate those results as well as a discussion of any findings related to the uncertainty in the outcome of the 2004 assessment. At that time, the document will be published on the Web and will be available on CD or in hard copy, as previously planned.